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ABSTRACT

Distributed by the U.S. Departments of Agriculture, Education, and Health and Human Services, this pamphlet provides parents with information and advice about their infants in the fourth month of life. Following a brief description of developmental characteristics at this age, the pamphlet offers information on topics including feeding, early dental care, doctor check-ups, the importance of fathers, games to play with babies, toy safety, communicating with an infant, and baby responses to facial expressions. The pamphlet also answers questions parents frequently ask, and offers guiding principles to help babies every day. A list of information resources for families concludes the pamphlet. (HTH)

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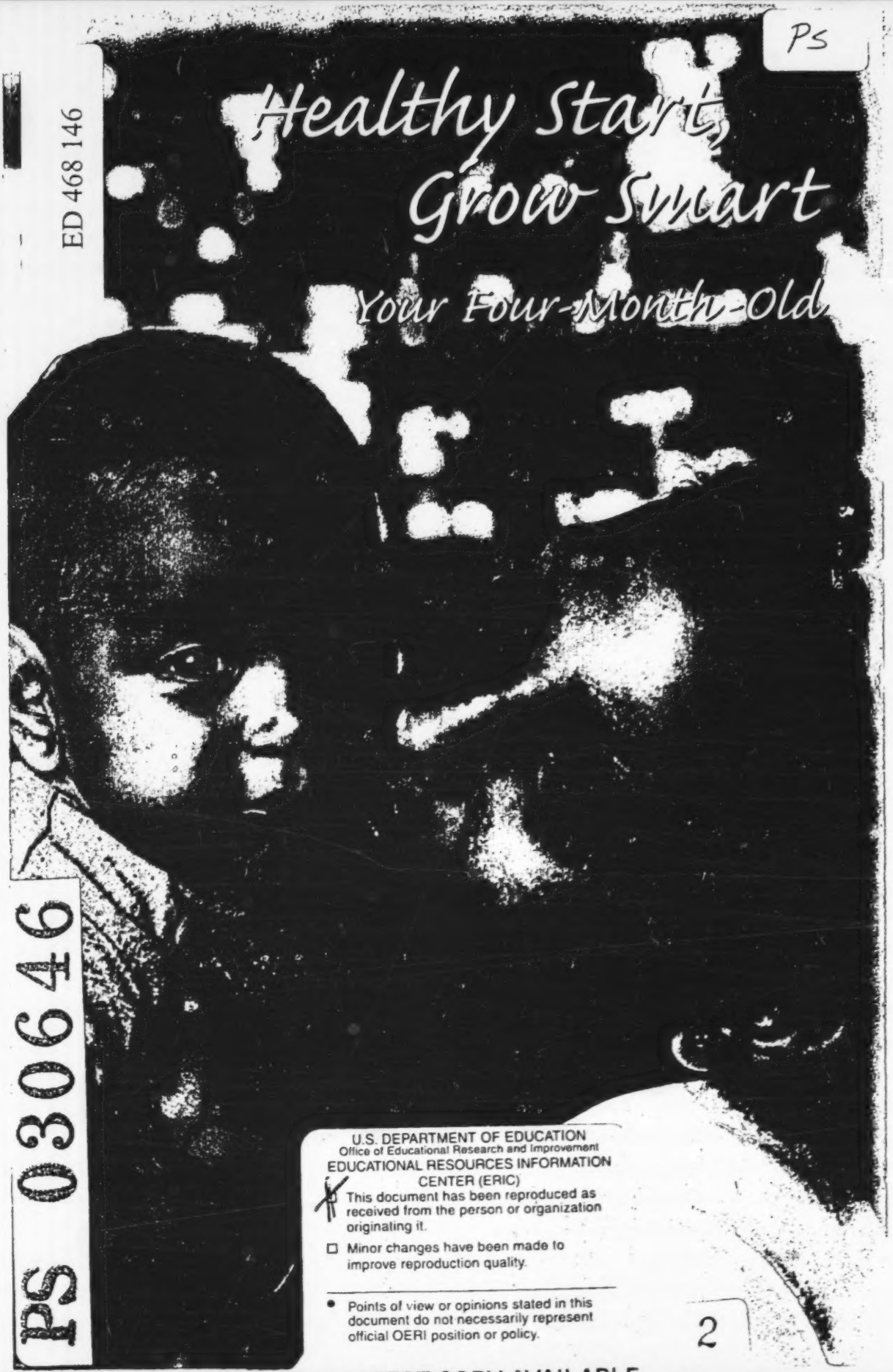
Healthy Start, Grow Smart

Your Four-Month-Old



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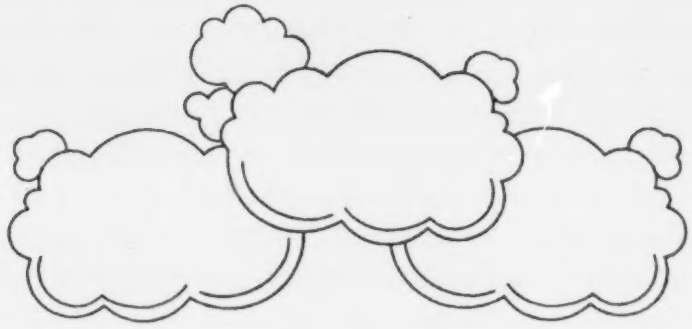

Healthy Start, Grow Smart

Your Four-Month-Old

Prepared by:
U.S. Department of Agriculture
U.S. Department of Education
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2002

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Your Baby Is Four Months Old

When your baby reaches the age of four months, things will really start to happen fast. She is growing and learning about her world. She is interested in everything she sees or hears. She is reaching for things and putting them in her mouth. This is how she learns about them.

When she is feeding, she stops and plays with your clothes, or she looks at other people in the room.

She may try to roll over. The more she tries, the better she can do it.

She smiles when she sees her parents and other people who care for her. She may frown when she sees strangers. She babbles. She tries to imitate your words as she makes sounds.

She may start sleeping at night for longer and longer periods of time. She will love it when you sit on the floor and play with her. You can have a lot of fun with your baby at this age.

The more you help her explore, the more she will reward you with smiles, happy sounds and love. You can help her by playing with her, singing to her and talking to her. Enjoy your baby as she grows and develops!

Feeding Your Baby

Make sure your baby is ready for solid food before you give it to her. Don't rush her into eating solid food. Some babies are ready for it at four months. Some babies aren't ready until they are older. Your baby's weight or age alone does not determine her readiness for solid food.

Here are some signs to look for that will tell you if your baby is ready to try solid food:

- ★ She holds her head steady and sits with support.
- ★ She reaches for and shows interest in food.
- ★ She opens her mouth when she sees food.
- ★ She no longer thrusts her tongue out during feeding, so she's able to keep food in her mouth and swallow it.
- ☆ She turns her head away when she's full.

Most babies are ready for baby cereal when they're between four and six months of age. Ask your doctor about the best time to start your baby on solid food. Rice, oatmeal or barley cereals are OK if they are finely ground. Use them one at a time.

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Mix some infant cereal with breast milk in a bowl. You can also use formula instead of breast milk. Don't use cow's milk or any other kind of milk or other liquid. Hold your baby in a sitting position or put her in a child seat on the floor (Be sure she is strapped in.) so she doesn't choke. Always use a spoon to feed solid foods to your baby.

See if your baby will take half of a very small spoonful. If she turns her head away or cries, she's not ready. Try again in a week or two.

When she is ready, she will take small, messy bites. She may roll the food around in her mouth or feel it repeatedly with her tongue. Making a mess is part of learning, so just have fun with her. At this age, your breast milk or infant formula provides all the nutrition your baby needs.

Give your baby only one new food at a time. You can then see if any one of the foods causes allergic reactions. Right now, only infant cereals are a good choice. If one of these types of cereals is a problem for her, she will vomit or get a rash. She may also have diarrhea. If this happens, call your doctor or go to your clinic.

Taking Care of Your Baby's Gums and Future Teeth

It's never too early to start taking care of your baby's future teeth. Here are some simple things you can do for her:

★ Never put your baby to sleep with a bottle.

★ Once a day, gently wipe her gums with a wet, clean soft cloth. Start doing this even before her teeth come in.

★ Some babies show teeth as early as four or five months. Most babies show teeth between six and eight months.

★ When her teeth begin to show, you may use a soft toothbrush for cleaning. Make sure it is baby-sized. Or you can continue to clean her teeth every day with a cloth.

★ Gently brush her teeth with water only. Toothpaste is not needed until your baby is around three years old. She should be old enough to spit out the toothpaste after brushing.

Your Baby's Four-Month Checkup

Your baby needs regular health checkups. She needs the checkups even if she's not sick. Checkups can keep her healthy. She will have her vision, hearing, weight and length checked.

Your baby will receive shots. Ask your doctor or nurse what to look for and what you should do if your baby has any reaction to these shots, like fever or fussiness. Shots will keep her from getting sick and keep her healthy.

The doctor will also make sure your baby is developing as she should. The doctor will ask you if your baby is reaching for toys. He will ask if your baby smiles and coos.

Before the checkup, write down questions you have about your baby. Bring the questions with you to the checkup. This is a good time to ask any questions you have about your baby. This is a good time to ask the doctor or nurse questions like, "What are the symptoms a baby has when she has a cold? How should I treat her if she has a cold? What kinds of problems should I call you for? What temperature should I call you for?"

Always ask the nurse or doctor for a copy of your baby's checkup results. It's a good idea to keep the copy in a notebook or safe place. If the doctor tells you to give your baby any medicines, write down the names of the medicines and directions. Using a notebook will help you keep track of your baby's health and development. Make an appointment for your baby's six-month checkup.

Your baby may get her first cold or ear infection. As your baby explores her world and plays with other children and adults, she will have more contact with germs. If you don't know what to do about her symptoms, call your doctor or clinic. They will be able to tell you if she needs to see a doctor.

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Dads Are Important

Dad, it's never too early for you to get involved with your baby. You have an important role to play in your baby's life. She wants to play with you and learn from you. Showing your baby that you care about her will help her. It will make taking care of her more fun for you and her mom.

Babies learn from all the adults around them. It's good for your baby to have someone besides her mom to learn from.

Taking care of your baby is important and can be fun. Be very gentle when you play with your baby. Use a calm voice.

If you do these things for your baby, she will reward you with smiles, happy sounds and love. She will smile when she sees you, and she will reach for you when she wants to play. The bond you make now with your child will last a lifetime.

You and your baby's mom can learn more about how to care for your baby. Look in the Yellow Pages of your phone book. There may be a "community service" section near the front of the book. Look under "support groups" for parenting help.

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Here are some things you can do with your baby:

- ★ You can hold her.
- ★ You can talk to her.
- ★ You can sing to her.
- ★ You can show her toys.
- ☆ You can bathe her and dress her.
- ★ You can comfort her when she's fussy.
- ★ You can help teach her how to talk.
- ★ You can take her to child care.
- ★ You can take her to health checkups.
- ★ You can help feed the baby. If your baby's mom is breastfeeding she can pump some of her milk into bottles, and you can give this breast milk to your baby. As your baby learns to eat solid food, you can feed her with a spoon.

Questions Parents Ask

"Whenever my baby cries, I pick her up. My friend says I'm spoiling her. Is my friend right?"

No, you don't have to worry about spoiling your baby. When you pick your baby up, you are doing the right thing.

By reacting to her needs, you are teaching your baby that she can trust you. Holding her brings her comfort. It shows her that you care when she is hungry, in pain, afraid or unhappy.

Meeting your baby's needs makes her feel safe and loved.

It's good to respond quickly when your baby is crying. Her needs are immediate. When your baby is hungry, she wants to be fed. When your baby is wet, she wants a dry diaper. When she is uncomfortable or scared, it helps her to be held.

It's not good to ignore your baby. She depends on you to respond to her needs. She learns to trust because you respond to her needs. Your baby needs a lot of love from you.

Coping with Stress

Taking care of a baby may cause stress. It's a big job. It's normal to have moments of sadness, fear, frustration or anger.

These feelings can be powerful. When you are angry, you may feel like hitting someone. You may feel like breaking things or saying hurtful things.

But there are other ways to deal with strong feelings. Here are some tips:

- ★ Talk about these feelings with someone you trust. The worst thing you can do is keep these feelings to yourself.
- ★ Talk to your spouse or a family member.
- ★ Talk to a friend, a doctor or a member of the clergy.
- ☆ Try to exercise. Put your baby in a stroller or in your arms, and take a walk. Exercise at home while your baby sleeps. Being active can make you feel better. Exercise can give you more energy to take care of yourself and your baby.
- ★ Take time to relax. Take a moment for yourself while your baby naps. Do something that calms you down. Take a break from your chores. Take a moment to talk to a friend, read, listen to music, just be still or enjoy a hobby.
- ★ Don't take your stress out on your baby by yelling at her or avoiding her. Get someone to help you for a while so that you can calm down or get rest.

If you want to know more about how to cope with stress or groups that help parents cope with stress, ask your doctor or clinic.

Helping Your Baby To Fall Asleep

Many four-month-old babies sleep through the night. They go between deep and light sleep several times.

★ A baby in light sleep may cry out. She may move around in bed. This may wake her up. As she cries and moves around, she gets upset. She will settle herself if she has a way to comfort herself. She may comfort herself by sucking her thumb or holding a blanket. Or she may get into a comfortable position, which will also settle her down.

★ Some babies have more trouble settling down than others do. Going to bed at the same time each night will help her settle down. Keep the house quiet. Loud TV or music may keep your baby awake.

★ To help your baby to relax, you can give her a warm bath, massage her or rock her. Reading or singing to her may also help her settle down. Don't rush to her if she starts to cry. She may calm down after a few minutes and fall asleep on her own. If she continues to cry, pick her up.

☆ Always place the same baby-safe soft doll or stuffed animal in your baby's crib when it is time for sleep. She will learn to connect the stuffed toy with falling asleep.

★ You can sing to your baby at bedtime. Put her to bed before she is completely asleep. Then stay beside her and pat her calmly. This can help set a good pattern for going to sleep.

★ What your baby does during the day can affect her at night. If she had too much excitement during the day, she may not sleep through the night. It may take several days for her to get back to her usual sleeping pattern.

What's It Like To Be Four Months Old?

How I grow

★ When I lie on my tummy, I may roll from side to side. I may even roll over onto my back.

☆ I may be able to sit with support.

★ I can hold my head up on my own. I can turn my head from side to side.

★ I use both hands to grab toys and other objects.

★ When I'm in the bathtub, I like to splash in the water. I always need to be held firmly so I don't slide into the water.

How I understand

★ I may get excited when I see people I know. Sometimes I don't like strangers.

★ I like some toys better than others.

How I talk

★ When you talk to me, I smile and squeal and coo.

★ I like to imitate sounds. I like for you to talk to me and make sounds to me.

☆ I babble now. I make lots of different sounds.

★ When I am happy, I coo, squeal, gurgle, giggle, grin and laugh out loud.

How I respond

★ I like to look at myself in the mirror. Sometimes I smile at myself.

★ I like to be touched and held.

★ I may fuss if I am left alone. I get bored.

☆ I may cry when you take a toy away from me. I may cry when you stop playing with me.

Games You Can Play with Your Baby

Babies learn by playing. Here are some games you can play with your four-month-old:

★ Play peek-a-boo. Place a sheet or baby blanket over your head, lift it up and softly say, "Boo!" Your baby will enjoy many ways of playing this game.

★ Sing simple songs to your baby. You can sing nursery rhymes, or you can make up your own songs.

★ Lay your baby on her back and sing a song while you gently move her arms in a big circle. You can also gently move her legs and raise her arms.

☆ Slip a colorful scarf through a plastic bracelet and tie the scarf to the arm of a chair. Lay your baby next to the plastic ring. Your baby will grab the ring and move the scarf around on the chair arm.

★ After a bath, sprinkle baby powder into your hands. Do not sprinkle it directly on your baby or near her face. Instead, gently massage your baby's body with the powder. Talk to her or sing a song while you're massaging her.

★ Put a brightly colored sock on your baby's foot. Your baby will notice her foot. In time she will be able to grab it with her hands. Make a game out of it by helping her reach for the sock and helping her pull it off.

Toy Safety Is Important

Babies put things into their mouths. So it is important to make sure all toys you give your baby are safe. Here are a few things to look for when choosing toys:

- ★ Make sure toys that you buy for your baby are labeled "non-toxic."
- ★ Toys should have no sharp edges or points.
- ★ Inspect toys often to make sure there are no loose parts. Older toys may break and have sharp edges.
- ★ Make sure small toys, such as squeak toys, rattles and teethers, are large enough so that your baby can't put the whole toy in her mouth. Smaller toys can get stuck in your baby's throat.
- ★ Don't give your baby toys with strings or ribbons. If you have toys like this, just remove the strings.
- ★ Don't hang toys or a pacifier around your baby's neck.

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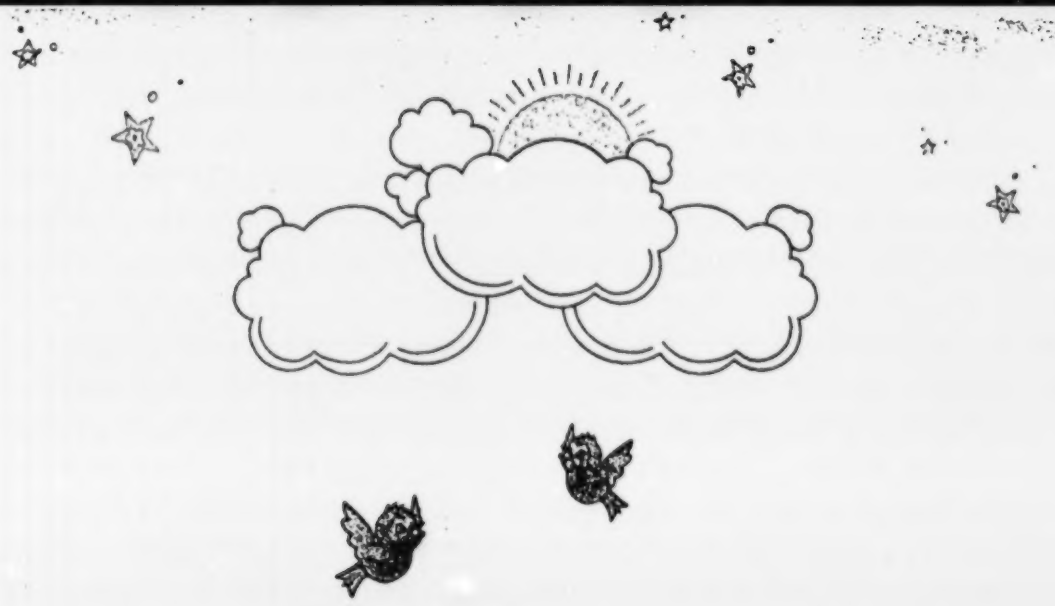

- ☆ Don't give your baby toys that have small parts. The parts can come off and she could choke on them. Check for small parts such as buttons and eyes that are glued on. Don't give her toys with beads that can be pulled off. Toys that are stuffed with small pellets can come apart, and your baby could choke on the pellets.
- ★ Don't let your baby play with a plastic bag. It can choke or smother her.
- ★ Don't give your baby balloons to play with. The balloon can break and create a choking hazard. Don't give pieces of popped balloons to children of any age. Babies and children can choke on balloon pieces.
- ★ Don't let your baby play with plastic wrapping from toys or other items.
- ★ Older children should be told not to use loud toys around the baby. Such loud noises can damage her hearing.

Helping Your Baby Explore

By the time your baby is four months old, she is beginning to learn to move around. She may even roll from her stomach to her back.

Your baby can sit up if you prop her up with pillows. She is also able to grab an object with both of her hands.

Since she can now hold toys, your baby spends more time playing.

At this age, babies need time to explore the world around them. It is important to give them time on a flat surface. Place your baby on a blanket on the floor. If you are outdoors, place a blanket on the ground. Make sure the blanket is out of the hot sun. Do not put it near objects or insects that can hurt her. Let her wear clothing that allows her to move easily. Watch her very carefully. Do not walk away leaving her on the blanket, even for moment.

Here are some activities to try:

- ★ Place toys just out of reach so your baby will reach for them. She will learn that she has to wiggle and reach to get the toys. If she can't reach a toy in a few seconds, place it within her reach so she doesn't get frustrated.
- ★ Spread a cloth on the grass and lay your baby on her stomach at one edge of the cloth. Gently raise the edge of the cloth so she will roll onto her back. Reward her with a hug and a kiss.
- ★ Place an unbreakable mirror next to your baby's blanket so she can look at herself. Make sure the mirror cannot fall and break.

Talking with Your Baby

At four months of age, your baby is already putting together ideas about speech and sounds. She does this even though she cannot speak.

Even without speech, your baby already knows how to "talk" with you. She "speaks" by being fussy or with happy giggles. She will learn more ways to let you know her needs, even before she learns to speak. She has learned to coo and laugh.

Not all sounds and gestures are for communication. Learning to make sounds is fun for a baby. Hearing the sounds she makes is also fun for her.

Taking turns is part of language. When your baby coos or gurgles, be sure to listen to her. Then respond. Talk to your baby often. Use both familiar words and sounds and new words and sounds. This will get her attention and hold it.

Babies start to learn to talk at different ages. They also learn in different ways. Talking to your baby a lot helps her learn.

Babies Respond to Angry and Happy Faces

A baby's social skills start to develop long before she can talk. So do her emotions. Babies quickly come to know emotions and to show them.

A four-month-old baby can tell a happy face when she sees it. And she can tell an angry face when she sees it. She is also aware of a face with no expression.

If there is a lot of yelling and screaming in the house, the noise and emotion will affect your baby.

Another step in learning social skills is that your baby will show when she is angry or sad. She'll do this when she doesn't get what she wants. Anger and sadness are normal. Even so, you don't want your baby to have any negative experiences that last a long time. Babies should have far more positive experiences than negative experiences.

Always be sure to comfort your baby quickly. It does more than provide relief. It also builds up the bond between you and your baby.

Babies differ in how social they want to be. Some babies want almost constant time with others. Other babies want more "alone" time. However, it can be very harmful to a baby to leave her alone too much or ignore her.

You should always respond to your baby's needs. This attention will make her happier. Her ability to think and know is tied to her emotions. Babies who feel good are more alert. They are also more attentive and responsive. They learn better. They remember better, too.

Learning about other people starts at an early age. Relating with people also starts early. It is a good start when your baby learns to trust and enjoy her parents and others who take care of her.

Your Baby Learns from Experience

Each brain, like each child, is unique. Here are some things you should know about your baby:

★ The brain grows fastest in the first three years of life.

★ It's hard to describe how a child's brain develops. It depends on traits that come from the parents. It also depends on the child's experiences. You can influence the part that depends on experience.

★ Babies cannot see well when they are born. At four months, your baby's vision has improved. Now she may show interest in objects all the way across the room. Show your baby bright and colorful objects. Move them slowly to help her stay interested in them.

★ A baby's hearing develops early. Talk to your baby often. A baby can remember patterns of sounds. She can remember the sounds of a story that you read over and over. She can also remember the sounds of a song. Tell her a rhyme over and over for several days. Read her a story over and over for several days. Or sing the same song for several days with your baby. Watch how she responds.

☆ Touching your baby gently can help to quiet her or to stimulate her. It depends on how you do it. Massaging your baby gently can help her relax.

★ Your baby learns more when you respond to her needs.

★ Most infant memories do not last long. Even so, your baby's memory is active.

Guiding Principles To Help Your Baby Every Day

Here are some important things you can do that will help your baby every day:

★ Be your baby's teacher. Babies learn when they have many good experiences with someone who loves them. Give your baby a rattle. Say, "Shake, shake," as you move it and make sounds together. Name things for your baby. For example, say, "Look at the tree. Let's sit under the tree." This helps your baby develop language.

★ Encourage your baby to explore. Your baby is at an age when she likes to be held up to look at things. Looking at things is important for her. Look at something together, and move it around. Your baby now is holding on to things and putting them into her mouth. This helps her explore. It also helps her develop movement skills. Find things she can play with like unbreakable spoons or plastic cups, and get down on the floor and play with her.

★ Get excited about your child. Show your excitement when she does something. Make sure you act immediately. Your baby will connect your pleasure with what she has just done. For example, when your baby sits up as you hold her, say, "Look at you! You are sitting up!"

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- ★ Repeat things with your baby. Babies learn by doing the same thing over and over. Your baby may learn faster when she has lots of time playing and talking with you.
- ☆ Communicate. Talk and sing to your baby. She has been learning about language since birth. Talking to her helps her to learn.
- ★ Do not treat your baby harshly.
- ★ Babies do not know right from wrong.
- ★ They should not be punished.
- ★ They should not be teased in a rough manner.
- ★ Never shake or hit your baby. Never allow anyone else to shake or hit your baby. This can cause injuries, brain damage or even death.

Information Resources for Families

Families who are enrolled in the WIC program (Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children) can get information on breastfeeding, formula feeding and nutrition at their local WIC office. Families eligible for WIC receive nutrition counseling and supplemental foods such as baby formula, milk and cereal. To find the WIC office nearest you, call your state health department or visit the WIC Web site at www.fns.usda.gov/wic/. Many public libraries offer free access to the Internet and provide help for first-time users.

For information about early childhood education initiatives, you may contact the U.S. Department of Education at 1-800-USA-LEARN or visit the Web site at www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/teachingouryoungest/.

To learn about child care options, you may contact the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Child Care Aware by phone at 1-800-424-2246 or visit their Web site at www.childcareaware.org/.

For more information and resources on postpartum depression, breastfeeding and many other women's health issues call The National Women's Health Information Center (NWHIC) at 1-800-994-9662 (1-800-994-WOMAN). You can visit their Web site at www.4woman.org/.

To learn more about breastfeeding, you may call La Leche League at 1-800-LALECHE or visit their Web site at www.lalecheleague.org/.

To learn more about free or low-cost health insurance for children, you can call the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Insure Kids Now program at 1-877-KIDSNOW. You can also visit their Web site at www.insurekidsnow.gov/.

The American Association of Poison Control Centers' (AAPCC) poison control hotline, 1-800-222-1222, should be on your list of emergency numbers. To learn more, you can visit the AAPCC Web site at www.aapcc.org/.

Families who cannot afford a car safety seat can contact the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. They can provide information on resources that help low-income families purchase or borrow child car seats. You may call them at 1-800-424-9393 or visit their Web site at www.nhtsa.dot.gov/.

To learn more about safety, you can call the Consumer Product Safety Commission at 1-800-638-2772 or you can visit their Web site at www.cpsc.gov/.

Coming Next Month

Is Your Baby Teething?

Your Baby's Sleep

Stimulating Your Baby with Toys

Interacting and Playing

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